

**Mission:**

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS**  
State Surgeon General & Secretary

**Vision:** To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## Health Officials Urge Residents to Avoid Contact With Wild and Stray Animals

The Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County (DOH-Pinellas) urges residents to avoid contact with wild and stray animals to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure.

In Florida, raccoons, bats, foxes and unvaccinated cats are the animals most frequently diagnosed with rabies. Other animals that are at high risk for rabies include skunks, otters, coyotes, bobcats and stray or unvaccinated dogs and ferrets. Each year, Pinellas receives reports of rabid animals. Most recently, two bats tested positive in December. These are the first reports of rabid animals for Pinellas County in 2014.

Rabies is transmitted through exposure to the saliva and nervous tissue from a rabid animal through a bite, scratch or contact with mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose or mouth.

DOH-Pinellas works with Pinellas County Animal Services in responding to incidents of animal bites, tests animals for rabies through the Department of Health state laboratory and quarantines animals as necessary.

DOH-Pinellas, as well as emergency rooms throughout the county, provides rabies vaccinations to victims of animal bites. This is the only known effective treatment for rabies prevention in humans.

The following are steps you can take to protect yourself and your family against rabies:

- \* Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for all pets.
- \* Keep your pets under direct supervision so they do not come in contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and contact Pinellas County Animal Services, (727) 582-2608.
- \* Call your local animal control agency to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood.
- \* Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted animals that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.
- \* Do not handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- \* Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home.
- \* Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- \* Prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools, and other similar areas, where they might come in contact with people and pets.

For more information on rabies, go to [www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html](http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html) or call DOH-Pinellas at (727)507-4346. For information about DOH-Pinellas, go to <http://pinellas.floridahealth.gov/>.